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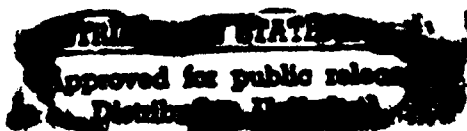
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**The Military/Media Clash  
and the  
New Principle of War  
*Media Spin***

MARC D. FELMAN, Lt Col, USAF

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by

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## *Abstract*

Principles of war are more than just a checklist for combat success. They are essential considerations that any would-be commander can use as an intellectual point of departure when contemplating combat operations. In the 1960s, a new fundamental principle of war was born in conjunction with the proliferation of television and the growth of television news. For the first time in history, the gruesome reality of warfare was brought into American living rooms on nightly newscasts. This powerful visual medium altered the entire interplay between the news media and government policy-making. In particular, it would no longer be possible to wield the military instrument of national power without first considering how it would "play" in the news media. Whether one views this as a watchdog function or merely a politically distorted propaganda effort of media elites, it is for better or worse a real phenomenon dubbed herein as "media spin."

Media spin is the product of a clash between media and military that has existed as long as the Union itself. Rooted in the Constitution, the antithetical goals of media and military result in inevitable conflict. While journalists have always been with the soldier, risking the same dangers and living side by side in the trenches, their perception of an absolute right to report the war flies in the face of the soldier's perception of an absolute necessity to preserve operational security.

This paper briefly traces the evolution of the military/media clash and identifies the Vietnam War as the turning point where mutual trust seemed to be permanently damaged. Government and military leadership pathologies combined with press distortions to leave the impression on the world stage that American wars could be won or lost in the news media. Right or wrong, the effects of a war perceived in the media to be lost precipitated safeguards to insure military campaigns in Grenada and Panama would not be lost on television news. While these safeguards and press controls became somewhat tempered by the time of the Gulf War, the Rubicon had been crossed. Military commanders could never again afford to ignore the way combat operations would be portrayed in the news media. This essential consideration for any would-be combat commander constitutes the new principle of war: media spin.

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## Introduction

Throughout the ages, and particularly in the last 200 years, warriors and scholars have attempted to codify and enumerate the so-called principles of war in an effort to educate and guide any would-be commanders on the proven ways of employing forces in combat.<sup>1</sup> While some generals undoubtedly have looked and will continue to look upon these pearls of warfare wisdom as a checklist for success, it is fortunate that most wise commanders realize codified principles of war—in any format—are at best an intellectual point of departure. For the purposes of this study a principle of war is not merely a distinct checklist item that if followed will insure success in combat. Rather, it is an essential consideration in modern warfare that merely interacts with many other time-tested truths a prudent commander must consider before conducting combat operations.<sup>2</sup> Gen Donn A. Starry explains:

Modern warfare requires the application of both the science and the art of war. The science of war is in a constant state of change, driven by new technological developments which can radically change the nature of the battlefield. The art of war, on the other hand, involves the critical historical analysis of warfare. The military professional derives from this analysis the fundamental principles—their combinations and applications—which have produced success on the battlefields of history. The principles of war thus derived are, therefore, a part of the art rather than the science of war. They are neither immutable nor casual, nor do they provide a precise mathematical formula for success in battle. Their value lies in their utility as a frame of reference for analysis of strategic and tactical issues.<sup>3</sup>

Vietnam provided a myriad of military experiences for future professionals to analyze, not the least of which was the remarkable impact that the news media had on the conduct of warfare. After Vietnam, concern over how military operations might be portrayed in the news media and how that rendering might effect success on the battlefield rose profoundly—so much so that “media spin,” as it is called here, has become a de facto principle of war. This new principle of war should be defined as follows:

**Media Spin**—Paying close attention to public relations, recognizing that public support is an essential ingredient of combat success. Aggressively insuring that media portrayal of combat operations is neither distorted nor misrepresented through press omissions. Above all, safeguarding the safety of troops and operational security but not lying to the media merely for sake of convenience. Never taking for granted how combat operations will be portrayed in the news. Avoiding operations that will swiftly turn public support away from the war effort and capitalizing on success stories by insuring they get maximum media exposure. In an age where 24-hour instantaneous battlefield news coverage is a fact of life, paying attention to media spin is of paramount importance. For a combat commander, anything less would be irresponsible.

Simply stated, media spin refers to the way the media presents a given story: it is the media's interpretation and presentation of a given event. While news media defenders usually insist that the news is reported objectively, this

study makes it quite clear that objectivity in reporting is a concept that is at best a worthy, yet unobtainable, ideal. It is largely because of this imperfection that the phenomenon of media spin exists. Obviously, one who controls media spin can influence a great deal more in the public arena than just military campaigns.

Renowned military author Samuel P. Huntington asserts that the "most notable new source of national power in 1970 . . . was the national media. . . ."<sup>4</sup> To support the premise that Vietnam was a turning point in national power dynamics and, in particular, the military-media relationship, it will be instructive to review briefly the historical record of this sometimes symbiotic, yet frequently adversarial relationship. While it is beyond the scope of this work to examine the history of American news in detail, it is possible to point to both examples of cooperation and conflict that clearly support the notion that Vietnam was a turning point in military-media relations. Furthermore, the evidence suggests now that this Rubicon has been crossed, no military commander or civilian leader contemplating the use of military force can ever again afford to ignore how such action would be portrayed in the news media.

## **The Power of the News Media**

Before continuing, it is important to examine briefly the nature of the power exercised by the news media in order to fully appreciate why media spin can significantly impact the battlefield. To at least a certain degree, news media can be a persuasive orchestrator of the "feelings and wishes of the people." Some commentators credit the news media with becoming an accessory to the political process, dubbing it the fourth branch of government, and referring to it as the "fourth estate."<sup>5</sup> Consider the fact that every morning in our nation's capitol, leaders begin their day with a press summary. Since "this generally precedes the reading of the classified Intelligence Summary [it] speaks volumes about the power of the press, for it is the Press Summary, for the most part, that will establish the problems that the government will address during the next dozen hours."<sup>6</sup>

The very act of picking and choosing which events will or will not be covered and what degree of attention an issue will receive is an act of significant impact. The resulting fare is what Americans grow to perceive as important. Given that the menu they have to choose from is dictated by a small number of elite news media executives, there can be little disagreement that this select few is particularly powerful.<sup>7</sup> The news audience may be greatly concerned about issues that impact their lives in a more personal and direct manner rather than the ones to which media executives devote most of their attention. Furthermore, news critics David L. Paletz and Robert M. Entman assert that

the primacy of these topics is reinforced by public opinion polls which pose questions of interest to the people who sponsor them—journalists and elites—rather than to the public. The questions tap public opinion which may at best be casual and tentative, ignoring issues on which many people have intense preferences or inchoate desires.<sup>8</sup>

As the media's power to move and shape public opinion has grown, so has its power to influence national resolve and thereby impact tremendously the complexion of military commitments and the overall ability to pursue and achieve modern battlefield success.

### **Historical Highlights: The American Media during Wartime**

Having noted the extraordinary power of the media to shape and orchestrate not only public opinion but public policy, we can now shift our attention to the ever-evolving military-media relationship. As early as the American Revolution, the news media emerged as a powerful force to be reckoned with. One of the greatest users and abusers of the press in that era was Samuel Adams. Adams engaged in propaganda campaigns that smeared Tory reputations and caused the last British administrator of Massachusetts, Governor Hutchinson, to label Adams "an assassin of reputations."<sup>9</sup> Writers were instrumental in inspiring the country to take up arms and eventually to win an independence that men like Adams helped engineer.

As the demands for independence began to build in momentum, someone needed to voice the ideology for the beleaguered patriots. One of the more renowned revolutionaries, Thomas Paine, aroused the people's will to press for independence through the power of his written words. Ironically, nearly 200 years later during the darkest hours of World War II, Winston Churchill rallied the British people with Paine's famous words: "These are the times that try men's souls. . . ."<sup>10</sup> Gen George Washington had Paine's *Crisis* papers, as they were known, read to the troops. "It is significant that the week after Paine made his first plea to the dejected, they turned on the foe and won a needed victory at Trenton."<sup>11</sup>

The evidence seems to suggest that George Washington was acutely aware of the unique form of government that America would have, where all power ultimately would lie with the people. In an effort to court the citizenry, Washington supported American newspapers that were widely read and that strongly favored the revolution. "George Washington understood that the war he fought was in part a public opinion war. He wanted victories on the battlefield but refused to achieve them at the expense of the people he hoped to influence."<sup>12</sup>

Many accounts of the War of 1812 hold that Americans fought over British abuses of free transit on the high seas and the impressment of former British

naval ratings. Under this view of history, the center of big shipping interests in New England should have been most aroused by British naval arrogance. Evidence shows that quite to the contrary, New Englanders were emphatic in their disapproval for the war. It was the Western newspapers that called for military action.<sup>13</sup>

The first foreign war to be covered by American correspondents was the Mexican War. "By combining the abilities of the pony express, steamers, railroads, and the fledgling telegraph, the press established a 2,000-mile communications link that repeatedly beat military couriers and the United States mails with the news from the front lines."<sup>14</sup> President Polk was exasperated to learn of the American victory at Vera Cruz via a telegram from the publisher of the *Baltimore Sun*. Nonetheless, it was a time when the press threw its full support behind the war effort, when in fact, war correspondents were an important part of the war-making apparatus.<sup>15</sup>

By the time of the American Civil War, journalism had profoundly changed. The invention of the telegraph, coupled with spreading American literacy, drew the United States together. "By 1860, more than 50,000 miles of telegraph wire spanned the country, and newspapers were in daily, sometimes bitter competition for the latest word on anything of importance that happened anywhere."<sup>16</sup> For the first time the government faced the dilemma of keeping the public informed without aiding or comforting the enemy.

The Civil War touched all aspects of American life. It was a costly and bloody war where brother fought against brother and neighbor against neighbor. Emotions ran strong on both sides, and both governments faced criticism in the press. The newspaper was the arena where the war of words was played out. The media's war was a battle fought to capture public opinion and boost morale. The fate of the Union was in jeopardy, and the will to fight was tenuous on both sides. News from the field made good copy and sold newspapers. "In New York City alone the circulation of the newspapers could increase by five times when word of a major battle arrived."<sup>17</sup> The American press had become big business that resented any form of governmental restriction.

Problems of operational security were amplified by the advent of the telegraph and the railway, with their inherent ability to disseminate news exponentially faster than ever before. A profound parallel can be drawn between the stunning improvements in technology that allowed reporters in Desert Storm to beam their stories instantly to television viewers around the world and the quantum leap in technology that the telegraph and railway brought to the Civil War. In both cases, attention to operational security suddenly became notably more sensitive than in previous wars.

Attempts to censor the press were initially clumsy, sometimes illegal, and pitted the antithetical goals of the press and the military against each other as never before in American history.<sup>18</sup> Generals began to cultivate a hatred for journalists, scorning the misinformation they spread and fearing the damage they could do to military security and their military careers. General Sherman vociferously disapproved of the government policy of allowing

newsmen to accompany the armies.<sup>19</sup> Many of the censorship rules developed during the Civil War laid the foundation for the measures used today.

The Spanish-American War cost very little in terms of American lives and made America a global empire. A thoroughly documented study in the 1930s found that William Randolph Hearst's yellow journalism newspapers were largely responsible for cultivating a war psychosis. Their handling of the sinking of the battleship *Maine* moved public opinion to cry for war in the spirit of manifest destiny.<sup>20</sup> The sensationalism of yellow journalism influenced news reporting well into the 1900s. Hearst frequently admonished his reporters to make some news if they could not find any.<sup>21</sup>

As far as most generals were concerned, journalists accompanying them into battle were, even in the best of circumstances, a nuisance. Gen William R. Shafter, commander of the American expeditionary force to Cuba during the Spanish-American War, epitomized this attitude. When the famous war correspondent Richard Harding Davis wanted to go ashore with the first wave of troops at Daiquiri, Shafter exclaimed: "I don't give a damn who you are. I'll treat you all alike!" Journalists responded by vilifying Shafter in the press.<sup>22</sup> While Shafter's frustration may have been justified then, as now, there is no point in alienating a press that has the power to determine how the military's performance will be presented before the American public. This was to become particularly true in the age of television and instantaneous reporting. Media spin had begun to take wings.

When the United States entered World War I, President Woodrow Wilson understood that the people's will to make sacrifices and persist would go a long way towards determining the outcome of the war. Americans were not predisposed to get involved in Europe's problems, particularly in light of the over one million casualties suffered in the Battle of the Somme alone. The spectre of the Somme loomed over Wilson's formidable task of mustering American determination to enter and fight a war on the other side of the Atlantic. Only a week after declaring war, he appointed journalist George Creel to establish a Committee on Public Information. Stressing German barbarism and the just cause of the Allies, the committee coordinated government propaganda efforts and served as the government's liaison with newspapers in locations around the globe.<sup>23</sup> Creel explained that "it was a plain publicity proposition, a vast enterprise in salesmanship, the world's greatest adventure in advertising."<sup>24</sup>

The Army's war reporting guidelines were extremely cautious in World War I. Hammond outlined the strict requirements as follows:

American newsmen who wished to report the war had to be accredited by a lengthy process that included a personal appearance before the Secretary of War, an oath to write the truth, and submission of a \$10,000 bond to insure their proper conduct in the field. In France, they submitted their writing to military censors who operated under the intelligence directorate (G-2), the arm of the Army most certain to protect even the least significant military secrets.<sup>25</sup>

These strict requirements were accepted as a fact of life by the press but did nothing to ease the adversarial tensions between military and media. The

military still found itself concerned over safeguarding operational security and protecting American lives. Most often this was equated with tight censorship of the news media. The press, on the other hand, had become a big and powerful business that closely cherished its freedoms. An attempt to balance the freedom of a powerful press against protection of national security interests would define the relationship between these two institutions for the remainder of the century. Critics argued then, as they do today, that protecting every detail of American involvement undermines the public's understanding of a war.

By World War II, all of the belligerents had the capability to broadcast news electronically. Just as with every other technological breakthrough that increases the speed of news dissemination, the electronic medium brought new challenges to media-military relationships. The record shows that the United States did a fair job of keeping both the troops and the public informed of general trends, understanding that in all likelihood bad news would become public anyway.<sup>26</sup> "While some commanders were hardly above overplaying their victories, battles during World War II were rarely misrepresented, and atrocity stories, fictional heroes, and outrageously inflated victories appeared less often than in World War I."<sup>27</sup> Chief of Staff Gen George C. Marshall initially kept himself insulated from journalists, assigning staffers to meet face-to-face with the press. Marshall gradually gained confidence and became quite adept at pleading Army problems to the press in person and arguing in favor of controversial commanders like Gen George S. Patton.<sup>28</sup>

Some critics hold that the press was co-opted during World War II, essentially insulating the American public from the harsh realities of war. It is true that the press held military commanders like Eisenhower in high esteem and cooperated with the military in an unprecedented fashion. The relationship was good on both sides, and critics were few when the war ended. In spite of claims that the press was somehow subverted, with few exceptions, commentators agree that under the circumstances World War II reporting was accurate and honest from both a military and press perspective.<sup>29</sup>

When war broke out in Korea, General MacArthur chose not to impose World War II-style field censorship. Reporters found themselves on their own in battle, facing harsh criticism from MacArthur's staff for filing stories without getting minimal military assistance. Some reporters temporarily lost their accreditation under charges of aiding and comforting the enemy. When the Chinese communists entered the war and United Nations Forces staged their disastrous retreat, MacArthur found daily press security breaches unacceptable and imposed full and formal censorship, claiming it was recommended by the country's top newspaper executives.<sup>30</sup> Stringent censorship regulations covered information that affected operational security, as well as information that might affect the morale of the troops or embarrass the United States. Correspondents labeled the restrictions as not only military but political and psychological censorship.<sup>31</sup> "Military information officers, for their part, provoked the press on a number of occasions by extending censor-

ship into areas of legitimate discussion and by withholding information on matters that had little to do with military security."<sup>32</sup>

While the Defense Department adopted a uniform censorship plan for all the services in 1952, forbidding censorship for other than security reasons, the perennial debate as to what constituted "security" had not gone away.<sup>33</sup> Journalist irritations from the Korean War set the stage for the nation's first totally uncensored war, Vietnam.

## Media Spin in the Vietnam War

The power of the camera's eye, as interpreted by television news journalists, greatly affected the conduct and outcome of the Vietnam War. As Pulitzer Prize winning author David Halberstam recalls in his book, *The Powers That Be*, Walter Cronkite had shed his hard-earned reputation for objectivity during a half-hour Vietnam War news special, where he declared "that the war didn't work, that a few thousand more troops would not turn it around, and that we had to start thinking about getting out." As Halberstam explains, this "was the first time in history a war had been declared over by an anchorman," and according to Halberstam, it caused Lyndon Johnson to say to his press secretary that "if he had lost Walter, he had lost Mr Average Citizen."<sup>34</sup> That a television anchorman, or any member of the media, should unilaterally influence a president's decision to seek reelection, and even more disturbingly, determine the country's involvement in the pursuit of national security policy, is alarming. While President Johnson is ultimately to blame for allowing media pressures to force his hand on these issues, nonetheless his response to Cronkite stands as striking testimony that the media can and does wield significant power in the public arena. It is the realization and appreciation of this power that makes media spin a significant principle of war.

When news loses its objectivity it is no longer news. In its most extreme form it becomes nothing more than propaganda. Unfortunately, due to slick packaging and salesmanship, news reporters tend to hold a position of veneration in America. This is particularly true of news anchors, the place where most people turn for their sole source of current events. Right or wrong, they are entrusted with the faith of the American public to report the news fairly and accurately—as they proudly claim to do. Any distortion for political motivations or any other reason poses a serious threat to the cherished American democratic process. Moreover, this constitutes a great deal more than just objectively reporting the news. Braestrup wrote: "The generalized effect of the news media's contemporary coverage of Tet in February–March 1968 was a distortion of reality—through sins of omission and commission—on a scale that helped spur major repercussions in US domestic politics, if not in foreign policy."<sup>35</sup> The Institute for Strategic Studies in London published a *Strategic Survey* in 1969 revealing that the United States had caused grievous

damage to both the North Vietnamese Army and the Viet Cong.<sup>36</sup> American author Don Oberdorfer wrote that a generation of the most dedicated and experienced Viet Cong resistance fighters had been lost.<sup>37</sup> In short, Tet was an unequivocal military victory for the United States, yet it played out in the printed and electronic media as an American failure.

Clearly, the Vietnam War presented those charged with conducting national security policy with challenges unheard of heretofore. Richard Nixon recalls in his memoirs:

American news media had come to dominate domestic opinion about [the war's] purpose and conduct. . . . In each night's TV news and each morning's paper the war was reported battle by battle, but little or no sense of the underlying purpose of the fighting was conveyed. Eventually this contributed to the impression that we were fighting in military and moral quicksand, rather than toward an important and worthwhile objective. *More than ever before, television showed the terrible suffering and sacrifice of war.* Whatever the intention behind such relentless and literal reporting of the war, the result was a serious demoralization of the home front, raising the question whether America would ever again be able to fight an enemy abroad with unity and strength of purpose at home [emphasis added].<sup>38</sup>

*New York Times* columnist James Reston wrote in April 1975, as US Marine helicopters were lifting the last Americans off the roof of the embassy in Saigon, that the media was being blamed for the defeat of American policy and power in Indo-China. Reston concluded: Maybe historians would agree in the end that news media reports were decisive and forced the withdrawal of American power from Vietnam. He felt that throughout the war, reporters had been more honest with the American people than government officials.<sup>39</sup> Whether one subscribes to this notion or not, one thing is certain: When it came to the Vietnam War, the government-media relationship was acutely adversarial. "The media contradicted the more positive view of the war officials sought to project, and for better or for worse it was the journalists' view that prevailed with the public, whose disenchantment forced an end to American involvement."<sup>40</sup> Clearly, Reston would not argue with many senior Vietnam War leaders who to this day insist the news media lost the war in Vietnam.

James Reston is credited with voicing the principal position of media executives of the time and clearly enunciating the tremendous power the media could wield. As South Vietnam was falling under the final communist offensive, Reston was not bashful with his prediction that future wars would only be possible if they received the blessing of the media. Reston put it this way:

There may be one important point here: It is no longer possible for a free country to fight even a limited war in a world of modern communications, with reporters and television cameras on the battlefield, against the feelings and wishes of the people.<sup>41</sup>

Whatever influence the press did have, one thing was certain in commentator Peter Braestrup's mind:

The Vietnam experience decisively changed the relationship between the press and the American government. The adversarial aspect of that relationship, normal in

peacetime, received its first modern wartime test under conditions of no censorship and divided public opinion. Not only some officials but large segments of the public did not understand—and some bitterly condemned—the extension of press freedom to the battlefield.<sup>42</sup>

If it were no longer possible to fight even limited wars against the feelings and wishes of the people (and accepting that to a large extent the news media orchestrates these sentiments), then Reston was implying that the media would have the last say in future decisions to participate in war. This remarkable influence is the legacy of Vietnam.

Vietnam was television's first war, and William Small, the director of CBS News in Washington, at the time, observed that "it showed a terrible truth of war in a manner new to mass audiences. A case can be made—and certainly should be examined—that this was cardinal to the disillusionment of Americans with this war, the cynicism of many young people towards America, and the destruction of Lyndon Johnson's tenure of office."<sup>43</sup> Vietnam newsman Edward Epstein held that "press coverage of the Viet Nam war was, in part, the product of an historical process and, in part, the product of new technology of which television was the single most important element."<sup>44</sup> Clearly, the news media, and television news in particular, had a tremendous impact on how the average American viewed participation in the Vietnam War. "American reporters in Vietnam achieved an influence in the making of U.S. foreign policy that had been equaled in modern times only by the role of the New York newspapers in precipitating the Spanish-American War."<sup>45</sup>

Epstein spent a year in the news offices of NBC and found that the *New York Times* was read thoroughly by key television news decision makers throughout the industry, thus exerting a powerful influence over news content and viewpoint. Since setting up cameras and shuttling camera crews between stories was a cumbersome business, Epstein discovered that network news was seeking out the "expected" event—in particular, one announced sufficiently in advance to dispatch a crew to the scene. Epstein found network news to be "ad hoc" rather than correspondents staying in contact with the same set of newsmakers over an extended period of time. In spite of NBC news executives' remarks to the contrary, Epstein found remarkable evidence of news that was produced and created by the newspeople themselves.<sup>46</sup> As an NBC News vice president explained, "It's not a Vietnamese war, it's an American war in Asia, and that's the only story the American audience is interested in."<sup>47</sup>

Even the most staunch defenders of the media in Vietnam point to the reporting of the March 1968 Tet offensive as a sore point. Charles Mohr admits that much of the public misperceived the tactical realities of the Tet offensive and agrees with Braestrup that Tet tended to overwhelm journalism and the conventional media tools and practices. While Mohr admits to the indiscretions of journalism's "significant shortcomings," he claims (as if the American public had another venue to gain news about the war) that "the domestic audience did not wait for press analysis before drawing its own sweeping conclusions. . . ."<sup>48</sup>

The American public did draw many conclusions about the Vietnam War based on what they saw in their living rooms on the evening news and on the front page of their morning papers. Throughout the Vietnam War, media spin became a growing concern as domestic support for the war effort began to wane. Air war targeting restrictions in Vietnam reveal pronounced impact from the media spin/public opinion synergism that evolved during the war. There were many factors that combined to influence targeting restrictions in Vietnam: cost-benefit analysis of crew and aircraft loss versus target value; psychological value of minimizing collateral damage, especially during holiday truces; political concerns such as risk of escalation and diplomatic maneuvering; and certainly the matter of sheer cost.<sup>49</sup> Media spin, with its profound impact on domestic public opinion, was only one factor, but it manifested itself at an unprecedented level, sufficient to become a de facto principle of war.

It was not long after the Rolling Thunder bombing campaign had begun in 1965, that scathing criticism began in the media at home. Pundits claimed that if the bombing continued, Hanoi would never be persuaded to negotiate. President Johnson felt that a halt in the bombing would signal weakness to Hanoi and only provide the enemy with more opportunity to move supplies. Nevertheless, Johnson took the risk, knowing that even "if our effort failed it might at least correct some wishful thinking at home and abroad."<sup>50</sup> When the bombing resumed, the media claimed Johnson had not given Hanoi enough time to respond. Pressure mounted in the press, and diplomatic channels indicated there might be some hope for negotiations if there were another halt in the bombing.<sup>51</sup> Once again, Johnson yielded to the pressure with the 1965 Christmas truce. Secretary Rusk defended the halt, saying that Johnson was concerned over American opinion and that he was convinced the Americans would back the war if he could demonstrate that a peaceful settlement was not possible.<sup>52</sup> This was to be the beginning of a trend where decisions over how to prosecute the air war in Vietnam were to be primarily determined by how they would be played in the media.

The Tet offensive had a marked effect on both the public and the government. Johnson revealed that he was not surprised at the response of the press, but what disappointed him was the dismal effect media reports of Tet had on various people inside and outside of government whom he always had regarded as staunch and unflappable. As a result, Johnson directed Clark Clifford to study the entire Vietnam War and to report on, among other things, problems to be faced with public opinion. In the end, four factors led to scaled-down bombing of the North. First of all, the South Vietnamese were improving militarily. Second, another massive Communist attack after Tet was unlikely. Third, the economy was in serious trouble back home. Finally, domestic public support continued to deteriorate because of the way the Tet offensive had been portrayed by the news media. Bombing was halted as a direct result.<sup>53</sup>

While it would not be possible to recount every military decision impacted by media spin, the examples provided are sufficient to substantiate that pressures existed and evoked response. After all, even one case where operational

military decisions are impacted by how they will be portrayed in the news media is a noteworthy turn of events.

Without question, the American news media played a significant role in the turbulent domestic arena of the 1960s and early 1970s. Whether journalists can be blamed for the failure of Vietnam is a question that historians will debate for decades to come. However, as press apologist Charles Mohr, a critic of Braestrup's thesis, expresses it, "It is necessary to separate mere failures in journalistic art, lapses in professional excellence, from the more complex and emotional question of whether journalism unintentionally or intentionally poisoned the well."<sup>54</sup>

While the United States did not "lose" militarily in Vietnam, in any classical sense of the word, she clearly did not "win" either. Every major battle was won, yet the United States never achieved any of the original stated objectives. Conventional definitions of the terms *win* and *lose* defy the reality of Vietnam. Perhaps that is why that quagmire arouses so much debate from chroniclers of the era. In any event, senior United States officials tried to quell domestic opinion and reassure Saigon that progress was being made. Braestrup reminds us:

Although U.S. intervention in 1965 enjoyed near-total Congressional acquiescence and editorial support, newsmen became increasingly skeptical of the official rationales and "progress" reports. Their skepticism, however selective and volatile, became part of U.S. journalism's conventional wisdom; officialdom reacted with fitful hostility that swelled into paranoia and worse during the Nixon Administration.<sup>55</sup>

Clearly, the news media has evolved into an overarching fourth estate of government. Under its umbrella sits the three-way system of checks and balances called for in the blueprint of our democracy. While it has always been influential, the news media, and in particular television news, came of age in the 1960s. Just in time for the Vietnam War, television news grew as its own art form and as a far-distant cousin to printed journalism. While human interest and emotion-packed stories traditionally have been an accent in the printed news, television news thrives on this fare.<sup>56</sup> Noting this contrast, Braestrup explains:

No print journalist on a major newspaper or wire service would be permitted the latitude allowed television reporters as they interpret on-camera the carefully edited film snippets that appear on the network evening news shows. The television cameras cannot show a battlefield or an election; they can show men jumping off a helicopter or a voter at the polls. Indeed, the vignette, often presented by the correspondent as a microcosm of the larger event, is the goal of television news. . . . and what the home office wants him to do, essentially, is direct the making of a vivid little action film, and supply theme and coherence to the pictures with his script.<sup>57</sup>

Media spin is the legacy of Vietnam. Since the 1960s, the news media have played an ever-increasing role in the public arena. Whether it is considered the watchdog or the mad dog of democracy, the fact remains that every administration since Vietnam has made a conscious effort to seek and build support for its programs in the eyes of the news media. In no area is this

more sensitive than in military affairs. Adm Thomas Moorer, chief of naval operations during the Johnson administration, recalls that at the time of the 1968 presidential election, Johnson announced a halt to the bombing strictly to generate a favorable response in the media to boost Humphrey's election chances. He even recalled General Abrams and General Westmoreland from Vietnam to outline the conditions that North Vietnam would, he was certain, violate. "Johnson wanted to give the impression that the war was winding down a week before that magic day in November."<sup>58</sup>

Media champions, led by voices like James Reston, take a lion's share of the credit for turning the course of history and forcing a United States military withdrawal from Vietnam. Ironically, media critics like Peter Braestrup echo a similar sentiment, giving credit to the media for removing American power from Southeast Asia. Both sides generally agree that there was some distortion and omission, particularly during the Tet offensive of 1968, and this in turn destroyed American will and unity of purpose.

The 1960s marked a turbulent era in American history, rivaled only by the War between the States. The Union was torn over civil rights issues and a little-understood war on the other side of the globe throughout the decade. News media, particularly through the vehicle of television, brought an unprecedented dimension to war reporting. Good or bad, it altered the way wars would be fought and reported henceforth. Having crossed the Rubicon, it has since become a *de facto* principle of war to consider how any intent to use the military instrument of national power will be depicted in the news media. Since Vietnam, military campaign planners have had to temper their plans with how operations would be portrayed on the evening news. Thus, one legacy of Vietnam is a new principle of war: media spin.

### **Media's Impact on the Battlefield after Vietnam**

"The press was shut out of Grenada, cooped up in Panama, and put on the late plane into Saudi Arabia." These words were written by the president of NBC News, Murray Gartner, on 30 August 1990. The op-ed page of the *Wall Street Journal* carried Gartner's complaints about censorship, which he claimed "exceeds even the most stringent censorship of World War II."<sup>59</sup> Gartner was neither an experienced war reporter nor, apparently, was he aware of the strict censorship and ground rules that journalists lived by not only during World War II but in Korea as well. Nonetheless, his remarks highlight a reality of late twentieth-century American life—a contentious media omnipresence on the battlefield.

As can be seen even from the brief review of the historical record presented here, the clash between military and media was born hand-in-hand with the nation itself. The Founding Fathers cemented the roots of this contentious relationship in the Constitution of the United States, where the architects of

American democracy not only gave the Congress power to provide for the common defense but ordained that it shall make no law abridging freedom of speech or of the press. The evidence clearly revealed that since the appearance of the first American war correspondents, there has been conflict between general and journalist. While journalists have always been with the soldier, risking the same dangers and living side by side in the trenches, their perception of an absolute right to report the war flies in the face of the soldiers' perception of an absolute necessity for operational security.

One of the most graphic examples of this clash of purposes between the military and the media occurred at the Battle of Midway during World War II. In this historic naval battle, America soundly defeated the Japanese navy with a numerically inferior fleet in a matter of minutes. "Yet this watershed of the war was the worst-reported naval battle in the Pacific. The first attempt to tell the American public about it almost resulted in the correspondents being charged with espionage, and it was months before anyone would believe that Midway was a victory at all."<sup>60</sup> Stanley Johnston of the *Chicago Tribune* was bewildered about the government's concern over his disclosure of the movement and location of enemy vessels. His story on the front page of the *Chicago Tribune* brought him a grand jury indictment for violating the Espionage Act. Johnston learned the particulars of the battle while on board a Navy transport after his rescue from the *Lexington* when it went down in the Battle of the Coral Sea. Sailors talked freely about the Battle of Midway to Johnston because they had heard of his rescue work on the *Lexington*, which no doubt gave them a sense of camaraderie.<sup>61</sup>

It was not until the end of the war that Johnston learned the real reason the navy had tried to punish him. The navy had known of the movement and composition of the Japanese force at Midway because it had been reading the Japanese codes, and it was worried about how the accuracy of Johnston's story would make the Japanese realize that their codes had been cracked.<sup>62</sup>

This is not to say the news media is always bent on revealing national security secrets or jeopardizing their own lives and the lives of troops just to get the "big scoop." On the contrary, history is replete with examples where journalists have regulated themselves, voluntarily holding from publication compromising operational information. When Marine Lt Col William R. Higgins was captured by terrorists in Lebanon in 1987, the news media withheld potentially harmful information.<sup>63</sup> Yet during the opening days of Desert Storm, Cable News Network correspondent Frank Sesno declared during one of his reports from the White House that if he were to happen across operationally sensitive information (a thinly veiled reference to when the ground war might begin), he would not hesitate to announce it on the air.<sup>64</sup>

Can the military risk the safety of troops and jeopardize successful accomplishment of national security objectives based on questionable journalistic volunteerism? While press members view themselves as the "watchdog" of democracy, they have the potential to behave like the "mad dog" of democracy. As veteran Vietnam journalist Peter Braestrup puts it:

The First Amendment assures journalists the right to publish and is interpreted by some journalists as encompassing the right to gather news. But there is no counterpart in journalism to "duty, honor, country," or to the military leader's ultimate responsibility for life and death.<sup>65</sup>

Most Americans can still remember watching the gruesome reality of the Vietnam War where the American will to fight was devastated daily along with the Vietnamese countryside. Before the end of the decade, Americans again would be humiliated watching embassy hostages in Iran and daily demonstrations in the streets of Tehran orchestrated specifically for the network television news cameras. Col Lloyd J. Mathews (US Army, Retired), the editor of *Parameters: U.S. Army War College Quarterly*, asserts that as evening news anchors counted down the days of captivity, they encouraged "the Iranians involved to count on an erosion of U.S. home-front resolve [thereby] changing the news, i.e., . . . making the news by their very presence."<sup>66</sup> Thus, the stage was set for a new era in military-media relations. The evidence that follows seems to suggest that concern over media spin would not be neglected in any future American military involvement. A new principle of war had been born.

### Operation Urgent Fury

The junior officers of Vietnam were the senior officers of Grenada, and they brought along with them a memory of a press many still believed was responsible for losing the Vietnam War. By October of 1983, senior government officials and military leaders wanted to avoid another Vietnam. President Reagan, no doubt fueled by the effectiveness of Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher's success in constraining the press for the Falklands War, tried a similar tack in Grenada. The press complained vehemently about their inability to accompany airborne and amphibious assaults on Grenada, and they were aghast at the lack of assistance given them in getting to the island to cover the story.<sup>67</sup> The US military leadership arrested those who did make it to the island, claiming it was for their own safety. Reporters accused US Navy aircraft of firing at their boats as they approached Grenada.<sup>68</sup> One can imagine the frustration of tomorrow's evening news anchors, unable to be at the front as their role models had done nearly 20 years before in the jungles of Vietnam. While this chapter in military-media relations may reflect a low point in military sensitivity to freedom of the press, "the episode may also illustrate some recent failings of U.S. newspaper and television reporting in showing the media at their worst; after Vietnam the media instinctively assumed that any foreign policy venture was automatically bound to be wrong-headed in its conception and sure to be an ultimate failure."<sup>69</sup>

News censorship is clearly necessary for reasons of safeguarding military secrecy. At the same time, news blackouts that keep the public unaware of the true costs of politically motivated foreign ventures are a serious breach of press freedom. Still there is another powerful rationale for restricting news

coverage of a military operation. Nearly all historical analysis agrees that the Americans lost the war in Vietnam because they simply could no longer persevere. The British took note of the American experience and applied it in the Falklands. It can be argued that American military leadership applied the same lessons in Grenada.

Here the public-spirited military officer might not have to feel that he has any malfeasance to hide from the public, but only the news and views that would have prematurely led to a cancellation of the operation underway, operations which might look pointlessly costly in too-early taking of stock, but would eventually pay off nicely in the recovery of the Falklands or the liberation of Grenada. The public will get the facts in the end, and the public may reach the conclusion then that the entire project was indeed worthwhile.<sup>70</sup>

By October of 1983, the pendulum had come full swing in media-military relations. Measured against comparatively unrestricted news coverage in Vietnam, Operation Urgent Fury represented a sharp shift in media restrictions during an American military venture. Shutting the press out of Grenada was clearly an overreaction based on a fear that an unrestrained press might muck things up again as many senior leaders believed they had done in Vietnam. If the press is not present, then there is no need to be concerned with the impact of media spin. The press's absence makes for a neat package; it not only relieves the field commanders of the pressure from live television cameras watching their every move but it removes the burden from the shoulders of the troops for ensuring the safety of reporters. Such extraordinary measures to eliminate media spin might work once in a society that guarantees freedom of the press, but as the record shows, the military would have to do better next time. While media spin had become a de facto principle of war, abrogating the freedom of the press was not going to make it go away.

In all fairness, if the military's handling of the news media in Operation Urgent Fury deserves criticism then so does the image the press presented in October of 1983. Prior to the invasion of Grenada, no newspaper or television news reporters were on Grenada. During the peak of the Vietnam War there were far less than 400 newspeople waiting on Barbados to cover the Grenada operation.<sup>71</sup>

In an aftermath of press complaints about being left out, the Department of Defense appointed a review board headed by Brig Gen Winant Sidle, the former chief of public affairs for the combined US services in Vietnam.<sup>72</sup> Amongst eight recommendations submitted to Caspar Weinberger, all of which he promised to implement, was the formation of a war pool to be sent within hours of an outbreak of combat. The intent was to ensure at least some correspondents were present until a full complement could get to the area of operations. When the Pentagon announced the formation of just such a pool in October of 1984, all of the major news organizations signed up, with only *Time* magazine's Washington bureau voicing any suspicions. But eventually even *Time* signed up, feeling they could not afford to be left out of such a venture.<sup>73</sup>

Thus, what might be considered a trace of institutionalized paranoia concerning the press's presence on the battlefield precipitated what the media considered draconian precautions in Grenada. The genuine concern for press safety and operational security was clearly accompanied by the ingrained feeling in the military that the press was somehow responsible for the humiliation of Vietnam. Furthermore, it strongly suggests that media spin had come of age and that its effect was clearly minimized by eliminating media presence from the battlefield. Whether such censorship was intentional or not, a repeat performance would be difficult, if not impossible, for the military to orchestrate. Something had to be done to meet media demands to be at the frontlines while at the same time not letting media spin steal away battlefield success. The press was not happy after Operation Urgent Fury but had to settle for the Sidle Commission findings and the press pool concept.

## Operation Just Cause

In the mid-1980s, the US grew increasingly worried about the brutal regime of the Panamanian dictator Manuel Noriega. Because of his substantive involvement in illicit drug trafficking, arms trading, and money laundering, Noriega had become a major menace in the region. By December of 1989, the thug dictator had tightened his grip on Panama, using his position to steal elections and further his own personal ends. He began to harass US personnel and their dependents in Panama with seeming impunity and had clearly gone too far by announcing a virtual state of war between Panama and the United States.<sup>74</sup> When US Marine Lieutenant Paz was killed on 16 December 1989 by Noriega's Panamanian Defense Forces (PDF), it became clear to the leadership in Washington, D.C., that something would have to be done about the Noriega menace. As President Bush put it in the senior-level meeting convened to make a decision on whether to execute the operations plan to capture Noriega and neutralize the PDF: "This guy is not going to lay off. It will only get worse."<sup>75</sup> After Pentagon officials briefed the president on the plan known as "Blue Spoon," attention turned to media spin. Bob Woodward clearly points out in his book *The Commanders* that the final issue before a decision was made to execute the plan was an estimation of public and press reaction. Once Marlin Fitzwater assured the president that reaction from both press and public would be largely favorable, Bush looked at Gen Colin Powell and gave the command, "We're going to go."<sup>76</sup> Powell was satisfied that six key questions had been answered satisfactorily: there was sufficient provocation, the PDF was now clearly out of control, Operation Blue Spoon promised to solve the problem, minimum damage and casualties were likely, the plan would bring democracy, and finally, public and press reaction would most likely be positive.<sup>77</sup> Consideration of media spin was beginning to mature as a principle of war, but as events unfolded in Panama, it was clear that

cooperation between the military and the media would experience still more growing pains.

While US Southern Command (SOCOM) in the month leading up to the invasion responded to the Joint Staff's request to develop a public affairs plan, they were stopped short of ordering airlift or providing adequate communications for reporters because the Inter-American Affairs Office said the plan was so sensitive it must not be disseminated.<sup>78</sup> The Panama invasion was to be the first real test of the Department of Defense Media Pool. Unfortunately, the military plane that flew the pool to the theater was over five hours late.<sup>79</sup> In all fairness, some of the lateness can be attributed to the last-minute addition of one ton of satellite equipment brought by NBC television.<sup>80</sup>

When Just Cause kicked off on 19 December 1989, Col Ron Sconyers, the Southern Command public affairs officer, had expected to use ground transportation for a Panama-based press pool and had not requested helicopters. Less than 24 hours prior to H hour, Assistant Secretary of Defense Pete Williams informed Sconyers a Washington press pool would be used. By this time all helicopters were dedicated to military missions. Had Sconyers relayed these difficulties to top-brass Pentagon officials, Secretary Cheney or General Powell might have been able to cut through the bureaucratic red tape and address the shortfall. But as it was, Sconyers did not relay his airlift shortfall to Washington.<sup>81</sup>

After the Panama invasion, the Defense Department ordered yet another investigation into the handling of the news media. Fred S. Hoffman, a former Pentagon reporter for the Associated Press and a former Pentagon deputy press spokesperson, conducted the study based primarily on interviews with civilian and military officials.<sup>82</sup> Hoffman made 17 recommendations that stressed less military surveillance of the press and encouraged Secretary Williams to aggressively bring problems of secrecy or other press obstacles to the attention of Cheney and Powell.<sup>83</sup>

Secretary Cheney admits that he deliberately called the pool out too late to arrive in Panama on time, but he defends his decision on the basis of security. Cheney also opted not to go with the US Army plan to use a pool of reporters already situated in Panama at the time of the invasion. "When reporters finally arrived in Panama City, military escorts barred them from the scene of the fighting. When the bulk of the press corps arrived to relieve the pool, they too were confined to a local military base."<sup>84</sup> Ironically, Hoffman's investigation revealed several breaches of security that occurred in spite of a press pool system that was designed to safeguard against such leaks. "Rules to protect the security of the operation were broken by *Time* magazine staffers who at a Christmas party openly discussed the pool as it was being formed December 19."<sup>85</sup> Had the concern for secrecy been any weaker, how would this have impacted battlefield success? While the Pentagon investigation criticizes the concern for secrecy, it also warns of what could have happened.

The United States was about to embark on a very complex exercise, one in which surprise was crucial not only in saving the lives of hundreds of troops, but also to

the success of the entire operation. In retrospect, *Just Cause*, like *Urgent Fury* in Grenada, was tremendously successful politically, achieving all the political goals envisioned and providing a context in which subsequent U.S. policy would be much more successful. But it could have gone the other way. Noriega's forces could have been prepared and U.S. losses could have been much higher. Noriega could have escaped to launch a guerrilla war. The Panama Canal could have been interdicted, creating great economic problems for many nations that would justifiably blame the United States for their difficulties. Finally, the United States might have found itself in a much weaker position to influence Panama's role in the drug trade, with consequent negative results.<sup>86</sup>

While there was no deliberate restriction of press coverage in Operation Just Cause, "there were so many problems and bottlenecks that press access was sorely restricted."<sup>87</sup>

In spite of press complaints about their ability to cover the war unimpeded, press treatment in Panama was an improvement from that of Grenada. Still, mistrust and resentment of the press lingered in the upper echelons of leadership, among people who still remembered Vietnam and the repercussions of a virtually uncensored war. By the time of *Urgent Fury*, neither the press nor the military handled themselves well. The press seemed shallow and unprofessional by sending more reporters to Grenada than covered Vietnam at its peak. Paranoia and institutionalized mistrust of the media caused the military to virtually shut the press out in Grenada, which then caused some critics to assert encroachment upon First Amendment freedoms. By the time of Operation Just Cause, at least lip service was being paid to the spirit of cooperation. Yet, no one could deny that the impact of news media on the battlefield was a well-understood principle at the Pentagon. While they may not have been overtly conscious manipulations of the press, the constraints in Panama, like Grenada, were at the very least unconscious attempts to eliminate media spin by simply eliminating the media from the battlefield. At the same time, the Pentagon had also matured in its realization that a decision to exclude the press from a military operation required a solidly plausible claim of security and/or safety concerns. If bureaucratic tie-ups added impediments to insulate the battlefield from the press, so much the better. But such rationale is short-lived. The next time things would have to be better, especially if the war were an extended operation lasting more than a few days or weeks. In the aftermath of Operation Just Cause, media spin had come of age as the new principle of war in that how military operations would be reported in the press was a concern leaders could no longer afford to ignore or to consider as an afterthought. Henceforth, media-spin concerns would have to be present from the outset as a campaign was being planned.

## Operation Desert Storm

On today's modern technological battlefield, where strategic surprise has almost become a thing of the past, operational security has become exponentially more sensitive. Operation Desert Storm stood as a stunning display of

unheard-of precision and lethality, coupled with an unprecedented ability to beam the sights and sounds of the battlefield instantly to television viewers around the world. Desert Storm graphically demonstrated the culmination of a technological revolution in both the way wars will be waged and reported henceforth. Instantaneous satellite feeds and cellular phones represent a quantum leap in communications technology from the war coverage of just three decades ago. In Vietnam, television film was shipped by plane across great distances. While it was the first war fought in American living rooms, it was just a crude precursor to today's conflagrations, beamed live instantly to living rooms around the world. Who can forget the reporters ducking Tomahawk cruise missiles during live reports from downtown Baghdad and the spectacular living-color fireworks display of an Iraqi Scud missile intercepted by American Patriot missiles in the night skies over Saudi Arabia and Israel?

Television has become the arena where foreign policy and diplomacy are played out instantly in front of a worldwide audience. Never was this more clear than during Operation Desert Storm. Saddam Hussein, taking a page out of the Vietnam War history books, was apparently convinced he could degrade the will of the American people and ultimately win his "mother of all battles" through media manipulation. Remarkably, even members of Congress tacitly recognized the utility and power of the news media in conducting the affairs of government. Deviating from strict parliamentary procedure and usurping executive authority, members of both houses addressed Saddam Hussein directly from the floor of their chambers during televised debates just prior to the decision to back the president in the Gulf War. David Altheide, professor of sociology at Arizona State University, noted this same dynamic during the Iranian hostage crisis. He recalls that the Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini personally answered prescreened questions from American television correspondents. Arguments and proposals to solve the situation were posed by reporters and the Ayatollah alike. Altheide concluded: "Despite network disclaimers to the contrary, there can be no question that decisions to emphasize certain events, individuals, and themes had a bearing on the character of developments in Iran."<sup>88</sup>

The chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Gen Colin Powell, feels that one of the most important keys to military success is a mature understanding of public relations and politics and how to make them work in the military's favor. At the National Defense University in December of 1990, he spoke on this theme, reminding the audience of senior officers that today's military leader must be adept at the political and media parts of his work. General Powell feels that in his case he earned the trust and respect of reporters, and he expressed a realization of media spin when he told the audience: "Once you've got all the forces moving and everything's being taken care of by the commanders, turn your attention to television because you can win the battle or lose the war if you don't handle the story right."<sup>89</sup>

Col John A. Warden III, the division chief of the special Air Staff planning group at the Pentagon that crafted the widely acclaimed air campaign of

Desert Storm, emphasizes how it was important to "win the peace, not merely do nasty things to the Iraqis."<sup>90</sup> Implicit in Warden's remarks was his overriding concern for media spin. Because of the tremendous impact the media has on the battlefield, casualties and collateral damage must be kept low. Warden feels it is not enough to win the military war, but the political war must be won as well. The campaign plan must make domestic political sense, and the media is where it will be played out. In Warden's words, "It has to play good in the press."<sup>91</sup>

Media spin is the reality of modern warfare. The concept of operations for the Desert Storm air campaign was heavily influenced by this sensitivity with direct references to how the operation would be portrayed to the American public.

Concept of Operations: Conduct powerful and focused attacks on strategic centers of gravity in Iraq over a short period of time (days not weeks).

- Target Hussein regime, not Iraqi people
- Minimize civilian casualties and collateral damage
- Minimize American and allied losses
- Pit US strengths against Iraqi weaknesses<sup>92</sup>

The first three items listed above directly concern the conduct of combat operations and how they will be portrayed to the American public in the news media. As Warden said, "Dresden-style bombing is no longer politically acceptable."<sup>93</sup> Live television news coverage is a reality of modern warfare that places more than just military constraints on operations. While military objectives might be easily attained with more economy and less risk to American lives by carpet bombing an adversary's capital, the gruesome sights of massive collateral damage and civilian deaths beamed instantly make such tactics politically untenable. Such means might have been acceptable in World War II, but the watchful eye of the news media makes such messy alternatives no longer acceptable.

Rear Adm Brent Baker, US Navy chief of information, asserts that all of the senior military leadership involved in Operation Desert Storm "understood that there were not only fast-paced ground-air and sea campaign maneuvers in Operation Desert Storm, but before, during, and after the war, a fast-paced war of words and images."<sup>94</sup> Admiral Baker, who was the Navy representative on the Sidle Commission on military-media relations following the 1983 Grenada operation which formalized the Department of Defense national media pool system, described the tremendous impact of media spin in a *Naval War College Review* article.

We all became prisoners of the TV-war, thanks primarily to CNN (Cable News Network), with its twenty-four-hour "live" coverage of Desert Shield/Storm. Admiral Frank B. Kelso II, U.S. Navy, Chief of Naval Operations, referred to CNN's "War in the Gulf" coverage by saying, "We had no idea how this would change our jobs and our lives."

One of the most important lessons learned from Desert Shield/Storm is that in all future wars the news media "army" (and television in particular) will be a twenty-four-hour instant news wartime player—like it or not! A senior U.S. Army officer in

a recent *Wall Street Journal* article said, "Some people say the media is the enemy, but in fact the media is really a battlefield, and you have to win on it."<sup>95</sup>

Testimony of this strength by senior US officials reflects a de facto acceptance of media spin as a principle of modern warfare. Leaders of future military campaigns would do well to hold media spin as a matter of prime import. Clearly, they cannot afford to do otherwise, especially against an adversary adept at degrading US resolve through superior utilization of media spin. This is not to say that a military operation should oppose or impede the media in any fashion other than that necessary to safeguard security and human safety. On the other hand, leadership cannot be naive and merely stand by while the news media is duped or manipulated by a cunning enemy. Foreknowledge of an enemy's intention to create negative media spin aimed at American resolve affords a campaign planner the opportunity to foil such distortion before it occurs. Saddam Hussein was a superb manager of media spin who waged a deliberate media campaign during Operation Desert Shield/Storm. But as Desert Storm commentator Norman Friedman points out, "Unless we comprehend just what he was trying to do, and how close he came to success in that effort, we will have missed much of the import of our experience. It was, of course, our good fortune that Saddam was much less [deft] at warfare than at prewar propaganda."<sup>96</sup>

Saddam Hussein clearly appreciated the military might that was being brandished against him. In all likelihood, he had read the Vietnam War pundits who had cast serious doubt upon the United States' ability to ever again muster enough national determination to spill American blood in a foreign land. After all, what was the United States' response to the Iraqi attack on the USS *Stark*?<sup>97</sup>

Saddam seems to have expected the United States to feint and threaten, but then to withdraw under pressure, under the cover of some face-saving formula (the withdrawal from Beirut after 241 marines had been killed was officially a "strategic redeployment"). He recalled the failure of Desert One, the botched rescue of the Iranian hostages. The U.S. attack on Grenada seemed to show that the United States would fight only easy wars; after all, it did not tackle Fidel Castro.<sup>98</sup>

Saddam Hussein blustered that his war-hardened troops would cause American troops to swim in their own blood. The news media were more than cooperative in spreading the images and words that not only publicized the nature of Iraqi fortifications but boasted of a robust chemical and biological weapons arsenal poised for use on coalition forces. Saddam Hussein made it clear that Iraqi soldiers were willing to accept casualties that the United States simply did not have the stomach to withstand.<sup>99</sup> "Hussein may be a secularist who unfurls the prayer rug only when a photographer is handy, but, in dealing with his ardent Moslem constituency, the man knows how to work the crowd."<sup>100</sup>

In late October a Saturday night NBC news program featured a report on troop morale in Saudi Arabia. Reporter Arthur Kent declared morale problems "pretty deep," saying that "perhaps half of the troops we spoke to said they were very unhappy with the way things are going."<sup>101</sup> Gen Colin

Powell was amazed as he watched the foolish report that really offered no substantiation for such claims, yet "it reminded him that if war came, it would be on television instantly, bringing home the action, death, consequences, and emotions even more graphically than during Vietnam."<sup>102</sup> Powell has a thorough appreciation for media spin and how any decision to move must be tempered by how it would be portrayed by television news cameras. A veteran of Vietnam, he knew for certain that "a prolonged war on television could become impossible, unsupportable at home."<sup>103</sup> Without question, Saddam Hussein was counting on it.

Clearly, from the outset of Operation Desert Shield/Storm, the top leadership took the initiative when it came to media spin. President Bush appeared on national television at 9 A.M. on 8 August to ask for the American people's support for his decision to deploy troops to Saudi Arabia. By 1 P.M. Secretary Cheney and General Powell had held a news conference essentially to emphasize the president's point that the mission of our troops was not to drive the Iraqis out of Kuwait but merely to defend Saudi Arabia.<sup>104</sup> With the memory of Panama still fresh in journalists' minds, Secretary Cheney and General Powell continued to enjoy a good rapport with the news media that they had cultivated in the aftermath of the successful Just Cause operation. Secretary Cheney briefed first and pointed out that the situation was different from Panama in that this was an on-going operation. He essentially made any questions about troop strength and their destination off-limits. After a few brief remarks, he turned the news conference over to General Powell. The chairman was refreshingly direct with the news people, asking for restraint on their part should they inadvertently learn information that might jeopardize the safety of our troops.<sup>105</sup> It was clear even as the campaign was in its infancy that senior US leadership gave primacy to the new de facto principle of war, media spin. Senior officials paid an unprecedented amount of attention to their dealings with the press, reflecting a respect for damage that could be done if they mishandled the press.

Still, in many corners there is a sentiment that the list of losers in the Gulf War includes the news media as well as Iraq. "As one seasoned journalist put it, throughout the war American correspondents were like 'senior citizens on a package tour'."<sup>106</sup> But journalists have little to complain about since they were "present at every stage of the [press] pool's evolution."<sup>107</sup> In the aftermath of Operation Urgent Fury, the Reagan administration had to deal with the "urgent fury" of the press. In response, the Sidle Commission recommended the press pool that has been utilized ever since.<sup>108</sup>

In many ways, the press pools and restrictions of operating in a Moslem host nation thwarted news media expectations of covering a war for the first time on live television around the world on the grandiose scale they had no doubt envisioned. In media eyes, the sensational images and sounds beamed by satellite, as they occurred, to living rooms in all corners of the globe, fell far short of what they were capable of showing and what they had full aspirations of showing. "Scores of journalists (some of which [were] blessed with a remarkable lack of understanding for military operations) flocked to the Gulf,

expecting to cover the war in the footsteps of first-line units—but actually ended up attending boring update press conferences, in which very little if any really interesting information was ever given.”<sup>109</sup>

Where senior leadership has at least a *de facto* acceptance of media spin as a principle of war, the news media is fully aware and suspicious of the attempt to manage that spin. In early February, one Newsweek article actually described General Schwarzkopf's appearances before the press as “diversionary tactics,” and part of an overall “spin” plan carefully orchestrated before dawn each day by White House, Pentagon, State Department, and CIA officials.<sup>110</sup> “Administration officials understand that the United States is engaged in a PR war as well as a real one. Saddam Hussein's strategy, they know is the same one that worked for Ho Chi Minh in Vietnam: to bleed the U.S. military until the American people give up.”<sup>111</sup> One foreign journalist put it this way:

As journalists, we cannot help being incensed by the way colleagues who went to the Gulf were treated as a bunch of potential troublemakers, and effectively prevented from doing their job. As members of the overall defense community, however, and knowing only too well the use some of the above-mentioned colleagues would have put any disturbing or shocking news or footage coming from the Gulf (as evidenced by their current inability/unwillingness to accept the fact that victory has indeed been achieved, swiftly and at minimal losses, so that the second Vietnam they were hoping for will not materialise [sic]), we must perhaps admit that the military's attitude was quite justified.<sup>112</sup>

As far as the Department of Defense is concerned, press arrangements in Operation Desert Shield/Storm were not the most restrictive ever in combat, as many journalists are claiming. Assistant Secretary of Defense for Public Affairs Pete Williams faults journalists for preparing to cover the previous war. In Williams's estimation, the limitations were not unreasonable considering the challenges associated with handling the largest press corps in history during one of history's most rapidly advancing military campaigns. Reporters did get out with the troops and Americans benefitted from the best war coverage in history.<sup>113</sup> In fact, Williams attributes an enhanced respect for the military as a direct result stemming from the thorough job the press did in the Gulf. Revealing the top brass's concern for media spin, Williams attributes some of the increased credibility gained by the military during the war to Secretary Cheney's and General Powell's decision to say only what they knew to be true. “We were careful not to get ahead of our successes.”<sup>114</sup>

While Williams acknowledges that the least-loved portion of the press arrangements was undoubtedly the press pool, it was the pools that got the first reporters to the scene. King Fahd of Saudi Arabia initially agreed to let only a small number of reporters into the country, and the Department of Defense media pool was the ideal place to gather this first increment of media people.<sup>115</sup> By December the press grew in number to almost 800, and the plan was reworked to allow reporters to cover combat commensurate with President Bush's November announcement that the coalition forces would build to provide an offensive capability. Anticipating restrictions on civilian air travel

should war begin, news organizations requested and received US Air Force airlift for reporters.<sup>116</sup>

Williams defends the ground rules and press guidelines as measures intended solely "to prevent publication of details that could jeopardize a military operation or endanger the lives of U.S. troops."<sup>117</sup> Defense Department planners looked at 1942 World War II rules that General Eisenhower established for the D day invasion and the guidelines General MacArthur dictated for the Korean War. In addition, they studied Vietnam press rules. Williams emphatically insists Desert Storm rules were not designed to keep journalists from "reporting on incidents that might embarrass the military or to make military operations look sanitized."<sup>118</sup>

On the eve of the ground war, there were nearly 1,000 aggressive reporters anxious to get where the action was. From a managerial standpoint alone, marshalling and protecting the unprecedented number of war correspondents in-theater was a monumental task that made the press pool a necessity.<sup>119</sup>

American ground units moved quickly—some of them by air. To cover the conflict, reporters had to be part of a unit, able to move with it. Each commander had an assigned number of vehicles with only so many seats. While he could take care of the reporters he knew were coming, he could not have been expected to keep absorbing those who arrived on their own, unexpectedly, in their own rented four-wheel-drives—assuming they could even find the units out west once the war started.<sup>120</sup>

Unlike the Vietnam War, Desert Storm was a set-piece operation that was carefully orchestrated to move swiftly once under way. There were no minor skirmishes in the jungle interspersed with occasional major offenses.<sup>121</sup> The press arrangements had no precedent in any prior major war, as "this was not an operation in which reporters could ride around in jeeps going from one part of the front to another, or like Vietnam where reporters could hop a helicopter to specific points of action."<sup>122</sup> As retired Air Force Maj Gen Perry Smith notes: "Within the first few days of the outbreak of the war, it was evident to most viewers of television that this war was going to be different from previous wars."<sup>123</sup>

Regardless of whether one feels that Gulf War news was completely sanitized or not, media coverage of any future wars will by necessity weigh heavily in determining the level of national resolve, the degree of commitment, and the complexion of the response. The press has grown in size and power, yet as *U.S. News & World Report* staffers wrote in their 1992 book entitled *Triumph Without Victory*, the American and international press was "disorganized, anarchic by nature, and chronically competitive among themselves."<sup>124</sup> The characteristics of the Gulf War tended to inhibit immediate news coverage. While it may be tempting to criticize the Department of Defense for apparently only allowing good news to be reported from the war, it must be remembered that the Gulf War was fast moving and heavily supported by air power. Future United States military combat operations will undoubtedly resemble the Gulf War in many ways. Partly this will be because of precedent but largely because, like it or not, this is the new paradigm

of how to best use the military instrument of national power. As *U.S. News & World Report* reporter John Leo commented, "Air wars are notoriously hard to photograph. So are land wars in which one side declines to fight."<sup>125</sup> Quite simply, so are wars that are fast paced and initiated in a shroud of secrecy necessary for tactical and strategic surprise. In Leo's opinion:

Now that we televise our wars, the images will very likely have more to do with building and sustaining support for any war than will the actual news of what's going on. This is what TV has done to our politics, and I don't see any reason to suppose that it won't happen to our wars. A White House official once phoned Lesley Stahl to thank her for a report on President Reagan that she considered devastating. The White House understood, as she did not, that the report's images were so strongly pro-Reagan that the words didn't matter.

For instance, that first film of the air war, showing a "smart" bomb seeking out and destroying a Baghdad installation, probably settled the issue of collateral damage once and for all. No later findings of inaccuracy could ever have erased that powerful image of precision bombing and the emotional support it brought to the war. . . . Facts now have to play catch up with the images—and rarely win.<sup>126</sup>

As the old adage goes, "pictures don't lie," and quite clearly they speak louder than words. Perhaps only good news was reported from the Gulf because that is precisely what the imagery portrayed.

Particularly noteworthy was a 17 January 1992 *Washington Times* article that held that the White House for the first time "conceded that public relations concerns figured in decisions on when and how to end the war while coalition commander General Norman Schwarzkopf was asking for more time."<sup>127</sup> Clearly, if the commander in chief takes counsel on how a potential military campaign will be portrayed in the news media before he makes any commitment to use the military instrument of national power, then media spin has truly come of age as a principle of war.

Operation Desert Shield and Operation Desert Storm were resounding successes in the eyes of nearly every American. However, one pocket of disappointment lies in the news media, who feel that they were cleverly kept from reporting any bad news. Even before the war was over, journalists began complaining about the press pools and their insulation from the action. Apparently, the military and the media are still at odds today, just as they have been since the Founding Fathers guaranteed freedom of the press and provided for the national defense. By definition, the military demands secrecy if it is to be successful, and the media ferrets out secrets if it is to perform credibly. This designed-in tension leads the military to mistrust journalists and the media to hold the military in contempt. It is a sort of zero-sum game where if secrecy is maintained the military wins, and if it is broached the media wins. The military maintains that it does not oppose freedom of the press and that as long as operational security and the safety of the troops are not jeopardized, the press is free to print and air whatever it sees fit. The media maintains that there is too great a concern for secrecy, that they have been somehow wrongly blamed for the humiliating defeat in Vietnam, and that the press pools are an elaborate scheme that they unwittingly helped

construct, designed only to corral journalists and keep them from portraying negative images of combat to the American public. As John Leo comments:

In opting to present viewers with only tasteful horror, the networks and military probably reflected public opinion. Few of us want to be grossed out, or have our children traumatized by real images of war. Still, prettifying war is likely worse. By shielding us from the real consequences of deciding to go to war, it makes great violence easier to choose. Before the next TV war, we ought to debate the amount of image control we really want.<sup>128</sup>

The media insists that they must be trusted to voluntarily safeguard operational security and the lives of American troops. In other words, they agree in principle that operational security and protecting the troops are vital, but as General Sidle puts it, "they want to do it their way. The problem is that the military has learned through experience that some members of the press do not always know what will impair operational security or endanger the troops."<sup>129</sup> It only takes one set of journalistic loose lips to sink the military ship. With so much at stake, the military has learned largely through hard knocks that how a campaign is portrayed in the media is vitally linked to success on the battlefield.

## Conclusion

In the last two centuries, military theorists have attempted to codify principles of war that could be used not only as a guideline before planning or commencing a military campaign but as a frame of reference for analyzing success in battle. In the 1960s, a new fundamental principle of warfare was born in conjunction with the proliferation of television and the growth of television news. For the first time in history, the gruesome reality of warfare was brought into the living rooms of America on nightly newscasts. This powerful visual medium altered the entire interplay between the news media and government policy-making. It would no longer be possible to use the military instrument of national power without considering how it would be portrayed in the newsmedia. Whether one views this as a watchdog function or merely a politically distorted propaganda effort of media elites, it is for better or worse a real phenomena dubbed herein as "media spin."

Media spin is the product of a clash between media and military that has existed as long as the Union itself. Finding its roots in the Constitution, the antithetical goals of media and military result in an inevitable conflict. While journalists have always been with the soldier, risking the same dangers and living side by side in the trenches, their perception of an absolute right to report the war flies in the face of the soldier's perception of an absolute necessity for operational security.

Prior to Vietnam, there is a rich history of both news media cooperation and conflict with government in both peacetime and wartime. This sometimes symbiotic yet largely adversarial relationship has been characterized by both

mutual distrust and admiration. Generals have frequently viewed the press as nothing more than a nuisance, while there is evidence that sometimes the media has been co-opted by the military.

Television news coverage of the Vietnam War brought daily harsh realities of warfare home to the viewing public with unprecedented candor. Mistrust grew between general and journalist as the power of the news media blossomed in the sixties. In the end both media critics and champions alike would recognize the awesome power wielded by the press. The Rubicon had been crossed during the war, and henceforth military campaign planners would have to temper their plans ultimately with how they would be portrayed on the evening news.

Operation Urgent Fury was perhaps just a "hiccup" left over from the mutual military/media mistrust and resentment cultivated in the Vietnam War. Operation Just Cause was to be the first test of the Department of Defense media pool. Heralded as the solution for protecting operational security and troop safety while still ensuring media coverage of initial combat, it fell short of media expectations. Desert Storm probably dealt the final blow to the press pools, but never again will the national leadership take media spin—the new principle of war—for granted.

#### Notes

1. See appendix 1 for a listing of the United States Air Force principles of war.
2. Air Force Manual (AFM) 1-1, *Basic Aerospace Doctrine of the United States Air Force*, vol. 2, March 1992, 9–15.
3. Gen Donn A. Starry, USA, "Extending the Battlefield," *Military Review* 61, no. 9 (September 1981): 2–12. General Starry wrote this while commander in chief of the US Readiness Command at MacDill AFB, Florida.
4. Michael J. Crozier, Samuel P. Huntington, and Joji Watanuki, *The Crisis of Democracy* (New York: New York University Press, 1979), 10.
5. Richard M. Clurman, *Beyond Malice: The Media's Years of Reckoning* (New Brunswick, Conn.: Transaction Publishers, 1988), 664.
6. Michael A. Ledeen, "Learning to Say 'No' to the Press," *The Public Interest* 73 (Fall 1983): 113.
7. David L. Paletz and Robert M. Entman, *Media, Power, Politics* (New York: Free Press, 1981), 190.
8. Ibid.
9. Edwin Emery and Michael Emery, *The Press and America* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice Hall, 1988), 72.
10. Ibid., 82.
11. Ibid.
12. William M. Hammond, "The Army and Public Affairs: A Glance Back. . . .," *Newsman and National Defense* (Washington, D.C.: Brassey's Inc., 1991), 3.
13. Emery and Emery, 117. They assert, "In 1810 the Indians went on the warpath under the great leader and statesman, Tecumseh, and his brother Teuskwatawa, 'The Prophet'. When frontier settlers discovered that the Indians were killing Americans with weapons supplied by the British through Canada, the leaders in the West pressed for war. They were not interested in the plight of the seafarers, or the Napoleonic blockades. Hammond asserts that Westerners were not particularly sympathetic to Eastern commercial interests and the effects

of the shipping embargoes imposed by the U.S. to boycott the arrogant Europeans at such great sacrifice to Eastern commerce."

14. Ibid., 165-66.  
15. Ibid., 166-67. In 1847, *New York Sun* publisher Moses Yale Beach, accompanied by one of his editorial writers, narrowly escaped capture while on a secret peace mission for the American government. Correspondent James L. Freanier of the *New Orleans Delta* personally delivered the peace treaty from Mexico City to Washington, D.C., in a record 17 days. While some like Horace Greely worried about the moral consequences of the war, the press for the most part wholeheartedly supported involvement in war and the idea of Manifest Destiny.

16. Ibid., 4.
17. Ibid.
18. Emery and Emery, 195-96.
19. Hammond, 4.
20. Marcus M. Wilkerson, *Public Opinion and the Spanish American War* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1932), 10.
21. Emery and Emery, 295. Hearst spared no expense in covering this war, putting out as many as 40 extras in one day and spending \$500,000 in four months.
22. E. J. McClernand, *The Santiago Campaign* (Richmond, Va.: Society of the Army of Santiago de Cuba, 1927), 10.
23. Emery and Emery, 356; and Hammon, 6-7.
24. George Creel, *How We Advertised America* (New York: Harper & Row, 1920), 4.
25. Hammond, 7.
26. Ibid., 9.
27. Ibid., 10.
28. Forrest C. Pogue, *George C. Marshall: Organizer of Victory 1943-1945* (New York: Viking Press, 1973), 359.
29. Joseph J. Mathews, *Reporting the Wars* (Minneapolis, Minn.: University of Minnesota Press, 1957), 176.
30. Emery and Emery, 494.
31. Ibid.
32. Hammond, 12.
33. Emery and Emery, 496.
34. David Halberstam, *The Best and the Brightest* (New York: Random House, 1965), 294. In Peter Braestrup's *The Big Story: How the American Press and TV Reported and Interpreted the Crisis of Tet 1968 in Vietnam and Washington* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983), he describes Halberstam as "a lanky, voluble, egocentric New Yorker." A Harvard graduate, Halberstam is a novelist and a veteran newspaperman. He was 28 when he was assigned to Vietnam working for the *Times*. He won the Pulitzer prize for his 1965 book, *The Making of a Quagmire*. Probably best known for his best-seller, *The Best and the Brightest*, he penned other less-known works on Vietnam and is considered an expert on the subject. According to Braestrup, Halberstam was a "dove" who hated top brass but admired combat officers.
35. Peter Braestrup, *The Big Story* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1977), xxi.
36. Ibid.
37. Don Oberdorfer, *Tet!* (New York: Doubleday & Co., 1971), 329-30. Oberdorfer was an eyewitness newsman present at Tet.
38. Richard Nixon, *The Memoirs* (New York: Grosset & Dunlap, 1978), 350.
39. Ibid., xviii.
40. Daniel C. Hallin, *The "Uncensored War": The Media and Vietnam* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), 3-4.
41. James Reston, "The End of the Tunnel," *New York Times*, 30 April 1975, op. ed. page.
42. Nixon, xviii.
43. Strategic Studies Institute, draft report of the study group, (Carlisle Barracks, Penn.: US Army War College, 25 May 1979), 2.
44. Edward Jay Epstein, *News from Nowhere* (New York: Random House, Inc., 1973), 9.
45. John Mecklin, *Mission in Torment* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1965), xii.

46. Epstein, 25-30. Epstein recounts an NBC news report by David Brinkley where the news was blatantly produced and created. Brinkley reported:

A vastly popular song through most of the summer and fall is called, "Ruby, Don't Take Your Love to Town." It's been high on the best-seller list, sung by Kenny Rogers and the First Edition. But it is more than a pop song; it is a social documentary, a comment on our times, and on the war. It is the lament of a Vietnam veteran, returned home gravely wounded, confined to his bed, lying there listening as his wife goes out at night, leaving him because the war has left him unable to move. Well, what the song says, and its wide popularity in this country, may tell more about the ordinary American's view of the Vietnam War than all the Gallup polls combined, and here is the song set to film.

Epstein recalls the three-minute film that followed. While it was dubbed a "social documentary," the executive producer of the Huntley-Brinkley news program revealed to Epstein that he knew before the story aired that the song was actually written in 1942 and had nothing to do with the Vietnam War. The film was a fictive recreation suggesting a definite connection between the Vietnam War and the crippled veteran. Brinkley's report aired on the same night he suggested to the public that NBC news was not produced or created.

47. Ibid.

48. Charles Mohr, "The Media," *Democracy, Strategy, and Vietnam* (Lexington, Mass.: Lexington Books, 1987), 182.

49. Maj Roger H. Bishop, "The Impact of U.S. Public Opinion on Air Strike Targeting in North Vietnam" (Maxwell AFB, Ala.: Air Command and Staff College, May 1973), 20.

50. Lyndon B. Johnson, *The Vantage Point* (New York: Holt, Reinhart, and Winston, 1971), 136-37.

51. Ibid., 235.

52. Ibid., 236.

53. Ibid., 15.

54. Mohr, 17. Braestrup describes Mohr as a "tall, balding Nebraskan." Mohr was a graduate of Nebraska State University, who started out in 1951 with the United Press in Chicago. He was 31 when he worked for *Time*, covering Vietnam from Hong Kong. Braestrup characterizes him as an "energetic, skeptical, honest reporter, a fast writer, always ready to cover 'the action', . . . a boon companion, a masterful teller of barroom tales, [and] an omnivorous reader. . . ."

55. Braestrup, xix.

56. Lloyd J. Mathews, *Newsmen and National Defense* (Washington, D.C.: Brassey's Inc., 1991), xxi.

57. Ibid.

58. Robert F. Pfaltzgraff, Jr., and Jacquelyn K. Davis, *National Security Decisions: The Participants Speak* (New York: Free Press, 1990), 79.

59. Murray Gartner, "Desert Storm Censorship," *Wall Street Journal*, 30 August 1990, op. ed. page.

60. Phillip Knightley, *The First Casualty* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1975), 283.

61. Ibid.

62. Ibid., 283-84.

63. Mathews, 10.

64. Frank Sesno, live broadcast on Cable News Network, reporting from the White House lawn on 18 January 1991.

65. Mathews, xix.

66. Ibid., 119-20.

67. Peter M. Dunn and Bruce W. Watson, eds., *American Intervention in Grenada: The Implications of Project "Urgent Fury"* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1985), 109.

68. Ibid.

69. Ibid.

70. Ibid., 112.

71. Ibid., 118.

72. Peter Schmeisser, "Shooting Pool: How the Press Lost the Gulf War," *The New Republic*, 18 March 1991, 22.
73. Ibid.
74. Bruce W. Watson and Peter G. Tsouras, eds., *Operation Just Cause: The U.S. Intervention in Panama* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1991), 3-14.
75. Bob Woodward, *The Commanders* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1991), 171.
76. Ibid.
77. Ibid.
78. Ibid. 132-35.
79. Schmeisser, 22.
80. Watson and Tsouras, 136.
81. Ibid., 135-36.
82. "DoD Criticizes U.S. Handling of Panama Coverage," *Broadcasting*, 26 March 1990, 100.
83. Schmeisser, 22.
84. Ibid.
85. George Garneau, "Panning the Pentagon," *Editor and Publisher*, 31 March 1990, 11.
86. Watson and Tsouras, 138.
87. Ibid., 134.
88. David L. Altheide, *Media Power* (Beverly Hills, Calif.: Sage Publications, 1985), 299.
89. Woodward, 155.
90. John A. Warden III, seminar question-and-answer period at the School of Advanced Airpower Studies, Air University, Maxwell AFB, Ala., 4 May 1992.
91. Ibid.
92. Ibid., from briefing slide.
93. Ibid.
94. Rear Adm Brent Baker, "Desert Shield/Storm: The War of Words and Images," *Naval War College Review* 44 (Autumn 1991): 59.
95. Ibid.
96. Norman Friedman, *Desert Victory: The War for Kuwait* (Annapolis, Md.: Naval Institute Press, 1991), 8.
97. Ibid., 108.
98. Ibid., 109.
99. Ibid.
100. Fred Bruning, "The Vietnam Lessons that George Bush Forgot," *Maclean's*, 18 February 1991, 13.
101. Woodward, 315.
102. Ibid.
103. Ibid.
104. Ibid., 277.
105. Ibid., 277-78.
106. Schmeisser, 21.
107. Ibid., 22.
108. Ibid.
109. "International Gulf Report," *Military Technology*, April 1991, 57.
110. Ann McDaniel and Howard Fineman, "The President's 'Spin' Patrol: How the Administration Wages Its PR War," *Newsweek*, 11 February 1991, 31.
111. Ibid.
112. "International Gulf Report," 57.
113. Pete Williams, "The Persian Gulf, The Pentagon, The Press," *Defense* 91, May/June 1991, 10.
114. Ibid.
115. Ibid., 10-11.
116. Ibid., 11.
117. Ibid.
118. Ibid. Some things not to be reported were details of future operations, specific information about troop strengths or locations, specific information on missing or downed airplanes

or ships while search-and-rescue operations were under way, and information on operational weaknesses that could be used against US forces. See appendix 2 for ground rules.

119. Ibid., 13.

120. Ibid.

121. Ibid.

122. Pete Williams, "The Press and the Persian Gulf War," *Parameters* 21, no. 3 (Autumn 1991): 7.

123. Maj Gen Perry Smith, USAF, Retired, *How CNN Fought the War* (New York: Birch Lane Press, 1991), 23.

124. U.S. News & World Report staff, *Triumph Without Victory: The Unreported History of the Persian Gulf Conflict* (New York: Times Books, 1992), 413.

125. John Leo, "Lessons from a Sanitized War," *U.S. News & World Report*, 18 March 1991, 26.

126. Ibid.

127. Frank J. Murray, "U.S. Concedes Public Opinion Tilted War Aim," *Washington Times*, 17 January 1992, 1.

128. Leo, 26.

129. Maj Gen Winant Sidle, USA, Retired, "Battle behind the Scenes—The Gulf War Reheats Military-Media Controversy," *Military Review* 71, no. 9 (September 1991): 53.

## Appendix 1

### Nine Principles of War

*Objective*—Direct military operations toward a defined and attainable objective that contributes to strategic, operational, or tactical aims.

*Offensive*—Act rather than react and dictate the time, place, purpose, scope, intensity, and pace of operations. The initiative must be seized, retained, and fully exploited.

*Mass*—Concentrate combat power at the decisive time and place.

*Economy of Force*—Create usable mass by using minimum combat power on secondary objectives. Make fullest use of all forces available.

*Maneuver*—Place the enemy in a position of disadvantage through the flexible application of combat power.

*Unity of Command*—Ensure unity of effort for every objective under one responsible commander.

*Security*—Protect friendly forces and their operations from enemy actions that could provide the enemy with unexpected advantage.

*Surprise*—Strike the enemy at a time or place or in a manner for which he is unprepared.

*Simplicity*—Avoid unnecessary complexity in preparing, planning, and conducting military operations.

**Source:** Air Force Manual 1-1, *Basic Aerospace Doctrine of the United States Air Force*, vol. 2, March 1992, 10-13.

## **Appendix 2**

### **Department of Defense Press Ground Rules for Operation Desert Shield/Storm**

The following information should not be reported because its publication or broadcast could jeopardize operation and endanger lives:

(1) For U.S. or coalition units, specific numerical information on troop strength, aircraft, weapon systems, on-hand equipment or supplies (for example, artillery, tanks, radars, missiles, trucks, water), including amounts of ammunition or fuel moved by or on hand in support of combat units. Unit size may be described in general terms such as "company size," multibattalion, "multidivision," [sic] "naval task force" and "carrier battle group." Number or amount of equipment and supplies may be described in general terms such as "large," "small" or "many."

(2) Any information that reveals details of future plans, operations or strikes, including postponed or canceled operations.

(3) Information, photography and imagery that would reveal the specific location of military forces or show the level of security at military installations or encampments. Locations may [be] described as follows: All Navy embark stories can identify the ship upon which embarked as a dateline and will state that the report is coming from the "Persian Gulf," "Red Sea" or "North Arabian Sea." Stories written in Saudi Arabia may be datelined "Eastern Saudi Arabia," "Near the Kuwaiti border," etc. For specific countries outside Saudi Arabia, stories will state that the report is coming from the Persian Gulf region unless that country has acknowledged its participation.

(4) Rules of engagement details.

(5) Information on intelligence collection activities, including targets, methods and results.

(6) During an operation, specific information on friendly force troop movements, tactical deployments and dispositions that would jeopardize operational security of [sic] lives. This would include unit designations, names of operations and size of friendly force involved, until released by U.S. Central Command.

(7) Identification of mission aircraft points of origin, other than as land- or carrier-based.

(8) Information on the effectiveness or ineffectiveness of enemy camouflage, cover, deception, targeting, direct and indirect fire, intelligence collection or security measures.

(9) Specific identifying information on missing or downed aircraft or ships while search and rescue operations are planned or under way.

(10) Special operations forces' methods, unique equipment or tactics.

(11) Specific operating methods or tactics (for example, air angles of attack [sic] or speeds, or naval tactics and evasive maneuvers). General terms such as "low" or "fast" may be used.

(12) Information on operational or support vulnerabilities that could be used against U.S. forces, such as details of major battle damage or major personnel losses of specific U.S. or coalition units, until that information no longer provides tactical advantage to the enemy and is, therefore, released by U.S. Central Command. Damage and casualties may be described as "light," "moderate" or "heavy."

**Source:** Pete Williams, "The Persian Gulf, The Pentagon, The Press," *Defense* 91, May/June 1991, 12.

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